

# **Native-Speakerism in Japan**

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# **Native-Speakerism in Japan**

**Intergroup Dynamics in Foreign  
Language Education**

Edited by

**Stephanie Ann Houghton and  
Damian J. Rivers**

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# Contents

Tables and Figures	viii
List of Acronyms	ix
Acknowledgements	x
Introduction: Redefining Native-Speakerism <i>Stephanie Ann Houghton and Damian J. Rivers</i>	1
<b>Part 1: Native-Speakerism: Shifting to a Postmodern Paradigm</b>	
1 'Native Speaker' Teachers and Cultural Belief <i>Adrian Holliday</i>	17
<b>Part 2: 'Native Speaker' Teachers in Workplace Conflict</b>	
2 (Dis)Integration of Mother Tongue Teachers in Italian Universities: Human Rights Abuses and the Quest for Equal Treatment in the European Single Market <i>David Petrie</i>	29
3 Kumamoto General Union vs. the Prefectural University of Kumamoto: Reviewing the Decision Rendered by the Kumamoto District Court <i>Kirk Masden</i>	42
4 The Overthrow of the Foreign Lecturer Position, and its Aftermath <i>Stephanie Ann Houghton</i>	60

- 5 Institutionalized Native-Speakerism: Voices of Dissent  
and Acts of Resistance 75  
*Damian J. Rivers*
- 6 Negotiating a Professional Identity: Non-Japanese Teachers  
of English in Pre-Tertiary Education in Japan 92  
*Joe Geluso*
- 7 Forming Pathways of Belonging: Social Inclusion for  
Teachers Abroad 105  
*Joseph Falout*

### **Part 3: Employment Policies and Patterns in Japanese Tertiary and Secondary Education**

- 8 Communicative English in Japan and 'Native Speakers of  
English' 119  
*Ryoko Tsuneyoshi*
- 9 Hiring Criteria for Japanese University English-Teaching  
Faculty 132  
*Blake E. Hayes*
- 10 On the (Out)Skirts of TESOL Networks of Homophily:  
Substantive Citizenship in Japan 147  
*Salem Kim Hicks*
- 11 The Construction of the 'Native Speaker' in Japan's  
Educational Policies for TEFL 159  
*Kayoko Hashimoto*
- 12 The Meaning of Japan's Role of Professional Foreigner 169  
*Evan Heimlich*

### **Part 4: Native-Speakerism as a Multi-Faceted and Contemporary Social Phenomenon**

- 13 Scrutinizing the Native Speaker as Referent, Entity and  
Project 183  
*Glenn Toh*

14	Racialized Native Speakers: Voices of Japanese American English Language Professionals <i>Ryuko Kubota and Donna Fujimoto</i>	196
15	Native-Speakerism through English-Only Policies: Teachers, Students and the Changing Face of Japan <i>Jennifer Yphantides</i>	207
<b>Part 5: Native-Speakerism from Socio-Historical Viewpoints</b>		
16	Changing Perceptions? A Variationist Sociolinguistic Perspective on Native Speaker Ideologies and Standard English in Japan <i>Robert M. McKenzie</i>	219
17	Ideologies of Nativism and Linguistic Globalization <i>Philip Seargeant</i>	231
18	The Native Speaker Language Teacher: Through Time and Space <i>Martine Derivry-Plard</i>	243
	References	256
	Index	282

# Tables and Figures

## Tables

Table I.1: Definitions of sexism, orientalism, racism and ethnocentrism by Oxford Dictionaries online	4
Table 5.1: Demographics of the people employed in the EC during 2010-2011	77
Table 8.1: Foreign researchers by selected departments at the University of Tokyo (2007)	127
Table 8.2: Number of courses in English at the University of Tokyo (2006-2007)	129
Table 9.1: Benefits and constraints for Japanese in the hiring process	137
Table 9.2: Benefits and constraints for non-Japanese in the hiring process	138
Table 9.3: Racialized and gendered benefits and constraints	138

## Figures

Figure 7.1: Forming pathways of belonging	115
Figure 12.1: The no/EFL eddy, swirling where the pro-communication-with-foreigners current runs adjacent to its opposite current	177
Figure 12.2: Japan's employment-of-foreigners eddy, swirling where the pro-inclusion-of-foreigners current runs adjacent to its opposite current	178
Figure 16.1: The native speaker/non-native speaker linguistic continuum	221



# List of Acronyms

Assistant English Teacher	AET
Assistant Language Teacher	ALT
Coordinator of International Relations	CIR
Council of Local Authorities for International Relations	CLAIR
English as a Foreign Language	EFL
English as a Lingua Franca	ELF
English as a Second Language	ESL
English as an Additional Language	EAL
English as an International Language	EIL
English Language Teaching	ELT
English Language Teachers	ELTs
European Court of Justice	ECJ
Japan Association for Language Teaching	JALT
Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme	JET
Japanese Teacher of English	JTE
Kumamoto Nichinichi Shinbun	KNS
Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology	MEXT*
Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication	MIC
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	MOFA
Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare	MHLW
Native English Speaker Teacher	NEST
Native Speaker of English	NSE
Native Speaker of Japanese	NSJ
Non-Native English Speaker Teacher	NNEST
Non-Native Speaker of English	NNSE
Sports Exchange Advisor	SEA
Teaching English as a Foreign Language	TEFL
Test of English for International Communication	TOEIC
Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages	TESOL
Times Higher Education Supplement	THES

**Note:** \*Until January 2001 the ‘Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology’ (MEXT) (*Monbukagakushou*) was known as the ‘Ministry of Education’ (MOE) (*Monbushou*). However, for the purpose of clarity, throughout this volume the modern MEXT acronym will be used even when referring to events that preceded the 2001 name change.

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Stephanie Ann Houghton and Damian J. Rivers  
*Fukuoka and Osaka, Japan*  
*26 June 2012*

# Introduction: Redefining Native-Speakerism

Stephanie Ann Houghton and  
Damian J. Rivers

*Native-speakerism is a pervasive ideology within ELT, characterized by the belief that 'native-speaker' teachers represent a 'Western culture' from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology.*

Holliday (2006: 385)

This definition of native-speakerism, first advanced by Holliday in 2005 and recognized soon after as a *Key Concept in ELT* by the *ELT Journal* in 2006, reflects a traditional orientation towards English language education rooted in dichotomous 'us' and 'them' dynamics in which 'native speakers' of English are considered the norm, the owners of the English language and its naturally endowed teaching experts, in contrast to 'non-native speakers' of English who are generally considered deficient, an ideology otherwise termed cultural disbelief (Holliday, Chapter 1).

In this culturally reductive politics of Self and Other, Holliday argues that non-native speakers of English are confined by an ideology of deficiency through which the vested interests of native speakers (and their predominantly Western Inner Circle in-groups) are promoted, while non-native speakers and their respective groups are systematically stripped of cultural value as inferior out-group members. Furthermore, academic analysis of these intergroup dynamics *also* tends to be marked by dichotomy as native speakers are cast predominantly as perpetrators, while non-native-speakers are cast as the only group worthy of authentic victim status (Rivers, Chapter 5). And the ELT labour market in Japan, for example, is itself 'dichotomized as Japanese/non-Japanese' (Hayes, Chapter 9), which overlaps native-speakerism as nationality is often conflated with native speaker status, and indeed, Heimlich claims that in Japan '[f]oreignness of the worker is the qualification of the [native-speaker] role' to 'firewall Japaneseness from hybridization' (Heimlich, Chapter 12).

Given the often *politically* motivated nature of the native speaker status ascription process, the primary concern when addressing native-speakerism in this book is ‘not with who is and is not a “native speaker”, but with the ideological associations of the distinction’ (Holliday, 2005a: 6), and its impact upon ‘many aspects of professional life, from employment policy to the presentation of language’ (Holliday, 2006: 385). The promotion of learner-centred ELT methodology, for example, has been characterized as a native-speakerist system of control that denies the identities of students and teachers from outside the English-speaking West ‘especially when they have difficulty with the specific types of active, collaborative, and self-directed “learned-centred” teaching–learning techniques that have frequently been constructed and packaged as superior within the English-speaking West’ (Holliday, 2006: 385).

Holliday suggests that ‘this cultural reduction, or culturism, falls within the broader *chauvinistic* [emphasis ours] narrative of Orientalism (Said, 1978)’ (Holliday, 2006: 386) through which the behaviours of ‘non-native speakers’ are ‘corrected’ by ‘native speakers’ through English language education as part of what Holliday calls their ‘moral mission’ to bring a ‘superior’ culture of teaching and learning to students and colleagues who are perceived not to be able to succeed on their own terms (Holliday, 2006: 386), praising the way in which Phillipson’s discussion of linguistic imperialism placed ‘the possibility and potential of imperialism in TESOL firmly on the TESOL agenda in the English-speaking West’ (Holliday, 2005a: 10).

In taking a more focused look at the notion of culturism, it represents a position borne from the combination of four contributing domains that include an essentialist view of culture, colonialist ideology, politics of the Self and Other and reification according to Holliday (2005a), and when applied to the specific field of TESOL, it is realized as native-speakerism. While the terms *imperialism* and *colonialism* tend to invoke images of Great Britain’s colonial past, Tsuneyoshi (Chapter 8) is quick to remind the reader that ‘[b]eing a colonizer, Japan has never been colonized by a foreign power; though it experienced a period of occupation by the United States after World War II, even then, English was never forced upon the public’.

Interpreting native-speakerism, then, primarily in terms of imperialism or colonialism, and thus ideology, can only limit the analysis in ways that obscure the complexity of native-speakerism as a global, and very contemporary, social phenomenon. Taking a broader view, the focus here is placed in this introduction upon *chauvinism*, an overarching umbrella term that encompasses other ‘isms’, including imperialism and colonialism. *Chauvinism* is defined in Oxford Dictionaries Online as ‘excessive or prejudiced support for one’s own cause, group, or sex’ (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/>

chauvinism?<sup>q</sup>=chauvinism), a definition that highlights connections between *native-speakerism* and *ethnocentrism*, *racism* and *sexism* through the concept of *culturism*, and by extension with *orientalism*.

Such discrete prejudices may, however, intersect and overlap in real life flavouring and influencing one another as multitudes of differing social situations come into being and then dissipate or persist throughout daily working life. Hayes (Chapter 9) shows how the inequalities characterizing the native speaker status intersect particularly with gender, race and age in complex and nuanced ways in the Japanese context, while Hicks (Chapter 10), also focusing on the native speaker as a gendered status, explores how various ideologies and structures come into play to present eight additional barriers to native speaker women. By way of contrast, and adding further complexity into the mix, Kubota and Fujimoto (Chapter 14) illustrate how the ‘complex manifestations of racial exclusion and Othering experienced by Japanese American native English-speaking teachers in Japan’ work together to exclude them in ways that are ‘based on a racial hierarchy of power is entrenched in contemporary Japanese society’.

While there are no entries for *culturism* or *native-speakerism* in Oxford Dictionaries Online, a cursory glance at the definitions of sexism, orientalism, racism and ethnocentrism presented in Table I.1 highlights the ways in which specific prejudices can target specific groups, involving intergroup dynamics rooted in antagonism, prejudice and stereotyping that can potentially result in discrimination as power struggles unfold that are entrenched in the conscious or sub-conscious desire for one’s own group to dominate another. Notably, however, while perpetrators and victims are to be found in any power struggle, they are not necessarily implied by the terms themselves. For example, it can be seen in Table I.1 below that the typical victims of sexism and orientalism are specified in the definitions themselves (i.e. women and Asians), but for racism and ethnocentrism, they are not.

When using pre-determined terminology to discuss different kinds of prejudices, the perpetrators and the victims may or may not be implied by the terms themselves, with the obvious danger being that the mere use of any given term (especially terms such as orientalism, sexism, male chauvinism and feminism) may accuse a certain group by automatically suggesting in the minds of people *who* are the perpetrators (in need of challenge) and *who* are the victims (in need of protection). And the same can be said of *native-speakerism*, a term which, within its present (albeit rather recently coined definition) *primarily* casts ‘native speakers’ from the English-speaking West as the perpetrators of native-speakerism (the subjects of the verb) and ‘non-native speakers’ from the English-speaking West as the victims (the objects of the verb). The objectification of native speakers is analysed by Toh (Chapter 13) who explores how ‘(1) the native

**Table I.1** Definitions of sexism, orientalism, racism and ethnocentrism by Oxford Dictionaries Online

Sexism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination, typically against women, on the basis of sex (<a href="http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/sexism">http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/sexism</a>)</li></ul>
Orientalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the representation of Asia in a stereotyped way that is regarded as embodying a colonialist attitude (<a href="http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/orientalism">http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/orientalism</a>)</li></ul>
Racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races;</li><li>• prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior (<a href="http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/racism">http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/racism</a>)</li></ul>
Ethnocentrism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• evaluating other cultures according to preconceptions originating in the standards and customs of one's own culture (<a href="http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ethnocentric">http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ethnocentric</a>)</li></ul>

speaker as a construct can, in different instances, be discursively represented, essentialised and “Othered” in the Japanese situation, and (2) how native speakers as people entering Japan come then to be employed, deployed, typified or otherwise looked upon the way they are’.

[While] native-speakerism originates in a very particular set of educational and development cultures within the English-speaking West and is an easy position for those who conceptualise themselves as ‘native speakers’, it has had a massive influence and exists to a greater or lesser degree in the thinking of all ESOL educators. (Holliday, 2005a: 7)

The quotation above gives due recognition to the fact that native-speakerism can reside in the minds of ‘native speakers’ and ‘non-native speakers’ alike – *all* ESOL educators – and Holliday *does* recognize that not all English-speaking Western colleagues are native-speakerist. Nonetheless, inherent to the term native-speakerism *itself* is the implication of native-speaker as subject, and

non-native speaker as object, a point with which this book takes serious issue for it renders present understandings of native-speakerism not only partial but also over-simplistic and biased. It has yet to be investigated empirically whether or not native-speakerism resides ‘largely within the sphere of English-speaking Western TESOL’ (Holliday, 2005a: 8), but most certainly ‘TESOL is configured within government policies and institutional structures within particular countries, which in turn gives rise to particular professional cultures and discourses’ (Holliday, 2005a: 8), and native-speakerism may manifest itself in different ways in different cultural contexts.

In a bid to release non-native speakers of English from the ideology of deficiency mentioned at the start of the introduction, Holliday (Chapter 1) argues that ‘it is possible to counter cultural disbelief by means of a subtle but significant professional shift to cultural belief, but that this also requires a shift from a modernist, positivist to a postmodern paradigm’. As part of this proposed shift, Holliday explains, the notion of the objectivity of the native – non-native speaker criterion is to be rejected in favour of a deep recognition of the subjectivity of the ascription process, whose insidious nature necessitates systematic consideration of the ways in which discourse serves ideology, while also being driven by it, in the construction of social reality.

To this end, following Fairclough (1995), Holliday recommends the use of critical discourse analysis to expose ‘the hegemonic discourse of native-speakerism. It explores the ways in which its prejudices and politics are deeply embedded in every aspect of practice’ (Holliday, 2005a: 10). Indeed, Hashimoto (Chapter 11) uses critical discourse analysis to interrogate the bi-lingual Japanese and English discourse of the Japanese government on the role of native speaker teachers played in Japan, revealing subtle, yet significant, differences between them that show how the term serves to restrict the functions of native speakers within the Japanese education system at least at the high school level. Notably, Hashimoto exposes how native speakers are viewed by the Japanese government not as teachers, but rather as *resources* to be utilized by teachers (i.e. Japanese teachers of English) for the purposes of TEFL. The Japanese government’s (MEXT, 2006) comparative analysis of the relative value of English language education of native speakers and Information Communications Technology (ICT) (see Hashimoto, Chapter 11) not only further illustrates the objectification (and, indeed, dehumanization) of native-speakerism mentioned earlier but also undermines Holliday’s definition of native-speakerism presented at the start of the introduction, which clearly rests upon the view that native speaker teachers are sought for their English language and teaching methodology.